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AMERICAN DEMOCRACY AND THE MODERN CHURCH. II

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WHAT HAS THE STATE A RIGHT TO EXPECT OF THE CHURCH?

On the principle of democracy, the church, comprising but a part of the people, is answerable in certain respects to the commonwealth, composed of all the people. Democracy has a moral right to demand reasonable returns for the privilege and protection guaranteed the religious body. Churches in the United States enjoy great liberty in matters of faith and propaganda, being usually tax-exempt, and in many communities the meeting house is protected against the near encroachment of competitive amusements, such as saloons and theaters. The value of the church in conserving morals and public order is thus recognized. Her ritual in solemnizing marriage and burial, in identifying the best *mores* with the will of God, her frequent challenge to better living, and her distribution of helps, spiritual and material, constitute an aid to government; while her training of the young in the knowledge and attitudes of religion is explicitly part of her public task.

Such service is not calculable in severe statistical form and seldom rises to conscious appreciation in the public mind. But it is noteworthy that few people will choose to live in a churchless community. Perhaps if the thinking of today were less mechanistic and not so shortly tethered to the ego-economic stake, there might also be a larger appreciation of the value to public welfare in the church's perennial ministry to the deepest emotional needs of the citizen, and in her bold but imperfect attempt to give to life some unifying philosophy and some meaning commensurate with the soul's demand. The nation forgets that need, industry ignores it; but the church, even when kidnaped by nationalism and drugged

by industrialism, still pleads the everlasting rights of the individual soul. The nation says "might," the industry, "wealth," and the church, "love." The pursuit of unmitigated self-interest on the part of men and nations is certainly that "broad road that leadeth to destruction; and many be they that go in thereat." It may seem fantastic and conceited, but, in the main, the church tries to save society from chaos by interposing steadily the basal principle of Jewish and Christian ethics—the doctrine of brotherly love. She is champion of the community of good-will, knit together by spiritual bonds and dedicated to the realization of the normal family relationship throughout the world.

Granting, then, that as an agency of social control and human welfare the church holds in fact some such place as is indicated by the governmental attitude toward her, the question remains as to what assurance the government, or all the people, may demand of the church that she is adequately performing those functions for which she holds the people's tacit or explicit franchise. To put it more concretely: if, from the viewpoint of democracy, the church is a public utility collecting large sums of money and aiming to render services from which the state deliberately refrains, has the state the right to demand anything by way of the standardization or efficiency of those services and to expect a wise and reasonable use of the money solicited from the citizens? In other words, is the state bound to see to it that the agency of religion gives the community a just return for value received?

It would perhaps be illuminating from this point of view if, in addition to the common religious survey conducted for the purpose of ascertaining the facts as to church and Sunday-school attendance and affiliation, attention should also be given to the community's budget for religious purposes, and a display made in terms of per capita expense and services rendered. In order to obtain a just estimate of the situation there is need that the community be regarded as the primary concern and the church as her servant. There is a place, not only for the survey of the community by the church, but also for the survey of the church by the community.

One point of approach to such a consideration is the important matter of the qualifications of the professional ministrant of religion.

In the professions of law and medicine the duty of the state to protect its citizens by requiring a certain minimum standard of training for practitioners is generally accepted as sound and reasonable public policy. In fact, the state is no longer negative in this task. For, in addition to restricting the personal liberty of incompetent would-be practitioners, she undertakes increasingly to provide that the health service needful to the community be furnished by the medical profession. Medicine is rapidly passing from a private concern, living upon the fees of unfortunate patients, to a social service of vast sweep and fine morale. Pure-food legislation is but the application of the same principle to less professional concerns.

Reasons for the greater laxity in setting minimum educational standards for accredited specialists in the care of individual souls and in the shaping of social morality must be found either in the nature of religion itself, as bearing no necessary relation to intellectual training and scientific fact, or in the practical impossibility of defining what constitutes religious leadership. Undoubtedly the present method of leaving ordination requirements wholly to the sect or to the local congregation, whatever it may accomplish in the mobility, local color, and numerical strength of the ministry, leaves the people at large without sufficient guaranty of the educational fitness of ordained preachers.

Just why social control remains incoherent at this point is rather difficult to discover. The general opinion seems to be that any tampering with "liberty of soul" would result in more harm than good. The principle involved, even if abused, is too sacred to be sharply challenged. It may also be that the accepted *laissez-faire* in religious competition finds foundation in the common belief in "revelation" as a past, fixed, and ended achievement. If the body of religious truth has been given, inerrant and endued with a divine right per se and is so recorded that all may read, then the qualification of the religious leader is a matter of biblical rather than of social training. He is not answerable to the world of facts but to the God of "revelation."

However, the amount of imposition, not always intentional, which is harbored by this "hands-off" method is by no means negligible, and probably one of the most serious impediments to the

progress of religion is the fact that the ministry is overcrowded by men of little or no preparation, who would not be tolerated in positions involving public health, justice, or financial trust. The practical result of the gravitation of the unfit to the needless churches of the small town is wasteful competition and costly delay in the solution of the real problems of village and country.

For obvious and perhaps valid reasons little has been written on sectarianism as an impediment to social action. Yet, with due respect to those who are trying to do good according to their light and ability, it must be acknowledged that in many places denominationalism impedes or arrests community effort for social ends. The adherent of the struggling church tends to shorten his radius of interest to that of the invalid institution, to consider its support the full measure of his benefaction, and to suspect the motives of rival churches if they essay anything more than a similar concern for their own slender tenure of life. The higher interests of the community, which might be served by combined action for educational, recreational, and civic improvement, are usually neglected because of the heavy tax for the maintenance of superfluous churches and because these serve to keep people of good will apart.

When these divisions are further accentuated by strict adherence to racial lines, so that impervious groups are maintained behind the barriers of foreign thought-forms and language and the church group identifies its religion with non-participation in the manners and aims of the community, then the church becomes a serious obstruction to the aims of the state and is morally chargeable with a misuse of the privileges which the state grants. The unfortunate tendency to live *on* the community rather than *for* and *with* it is fostered, along with the disability to co-operate intelligently in the common task of government.

The right of the government to prevent wasteful duplication of public and semipublic service in the interest of all the people is by no means clearly defined, and, for example, while a dozen milk wagons rattle back and forth over a route that might be served by one delivery, and a common commodity necessary to every family and already subject to municipal inspection is bantered about by silly competition at great cost to the consuming public, it would be

premature to expect a much more rational method among the vendors of a commodity so optional and variable as church religion.

Yet it is possible to forecast a time when public opinion, which is becoming increasingly sensitive to the inutility and costliness of a ministry overcrowded by those who are unfit and therefore obstructive to united community effort for good, will demand, perhaps by law, a more adequate education for the professional religious leader. Such insistence upon a minimum, although not uniform, education for the professional who lives by religion would not necessarily violate the principle of religious liberty for the individual. It would only enforce the fact that the assumption of a social task as a life-calling must not be the presumption of ignorance or weak sentimentality, but the rational service of an enlightened and trained mind.

A public policy of this sort requiring a minimum of general education, equivalent to a Bachelor's degree, would bear upon the church's discharge of her just functions as a public institution in yet another way. For the professional specialties still reserved to the denominational theological seminary would be saved from narrowness by the preceding liberal education, since the college man, grounded in empirical and historical method and awakened by the social sciences, swings from sectarianism to community interest, from competition with variant believers to a campaign for moral objectives. The man who in motive and character is fit to enter the ministry would by virtue of such training seek to align and unify the religious forces of a parish so as best to serve the community life.

It seems highly imperative in the present state of American democracy that the bonds which make for coherence and unity be greatly strengthened and that some cause more compelling than the residuary nationalism of the immigrant or its revival in the native-born be brought to the fore. Socialism has served somewhat in this capacity, but it is quite possible that a serious acceptance of the Christian teaching of human brotherhood and the application of the family ideal to the entire community of men and nations is the only solution for class and race divisiveness. Something more commanding and idealistic than the appeal to party and national

symbols is necessary in order that the citizen may rise from impulsive response to secondary motives to moral response to an end so exalted as to carry the value of religion. The salvation of a democracy which shall cherish the well-being of all mankind as it does that of its own citizens rests with religion.

Despite the fact that religious organizations are often, wittingly or unwittingly, recruited to un-Christian national ambition, the fact remains that for both internal and international brotherhood the world depends chiefly upon the religious prophet and the exercise of Christlike altruism. Practically the only international strands holding in the war-rent world of today are those of the Red Cross and of the equally valiant service of the Young Men's Christian Association with the armies and in the prison camps of Europe. These testify that the so-called moratorium of Christianity is by no means complete.

Now, whether one looks out upon this vast field or confines his attention to the most ordinary community, he is forced to the conclusion that the hope of survival of any human society worthy of the name rests with this doctrine of love. The machinery of government, even when carried to the highest point of efficiency, will not guarantee that human beings will live together as befits man. The spirit infusing the process determines success or failure. The kind of living itself is the real reward. In the last analysis the achievement of democracy is not measured in things, but in fulness of life; and when fair discount has been made, does not the church, taken as a whole, stand for that abundant life which the founder of Christianity proclaimed as his mission to the world?

It is therefore, perhaps, a tribute to an idealism, like unto her own at its best, that democracy fosters the church, believing that in an organization whose selective principle is the teaching of Jesus there is the greatest likelihood that the highest life-values attainable in any society will be demonstrated. Hence the church carries a certain self-imposed obligation as being a proving-ground for the finest possibilities of human association. Within the biblical concept of the church, as in its sacred status defined by theologians, there is this rich and positive consciousness, explaining and miti-

gating somewhat a separateness which has at times seemed aloof and non-social to the outsider.

As an offset to this tendency, which may become pharisaism, democracy rightly expects the church to make plain to all men her redemptive principle, her formula for a perfect society. From democracy's viewpoint the church is not very efficient in the discharge of this duty. Her failure to make her ideal ethic that of industries and nations may be due to many causes. It is not enough to fall back upon the weakness, inertia, and selfishness of human nature. For mankind, and especially the youth of the world, give sufficient proof of an illimitable ability to respond to that which is difficult, hazardous, and sacrificial. Perhaps it is not too much to believe that in every normal life there comes a period in which selfhood demands that very thing as the crown of existence, the superb assurance of causal relation to one's world. Even within the church only trivial use is made of this pregnant idealism. The relay of new life so potential for world-betterment, coming over the crest that lies between childhood and manhood, dribbles down to commonplace self-interest because the trumpet call is not heard and leadership in the fight for human rights is lacking. The central meaning of the gospel is not made plain to, nor adopted by, any large number of the youth of the church.

As for most of the mature and aged, the gospel has no social meaning commensurate with, or related to, democracy's problems. It is as if Jesus spoke in another room and his articulate imperatives reached the hearers only as a comforting lullaby, an assurance that he was near, but not near enough to disturb. How else can one explain the timid seclusion of church people within half-empty buildings, the sterility of their summer religion, their failure to find the crowd, wherever it may be, and to compel attention, even if the attention secured were only hostile? So far as the "outsider" is concerned, he usually does not perceive what the church religionist is talking about. His supposition is that someone is trying to make converts to the church, intends to take up a collection, is earning easy money, is underpinning a top-heavy industrialism by "sawdust-trail" methods, or is ranting in an unknown tongue,

which tongue is traditional theology. The obligation of the church to get the gospel to the people as dynamic for achieving fulness of life, to make plain its consuming righteousness for the individual, group, or nation, irrespective of class and privilege, and to infold all men in brotherly relationship is an obligation awaiting fulfilment. American democracy is offering a fair field for this enterprise, with her own future, if not her life, at stake. If the church is not to fail in this critical issue, she will need to give at least as much attention to the understanding of society as she gives to her sacred books and her inherited doctrines.

Mastery of biblical interpretation and church history is less difficult than an understanding of modern society. It is easier to study the residue of a past age than to measure the contending forces in current life and to learn their moral significance. Without this latter ability it happens that the authority of the remote past, with its uninterpreted ethics of the dead, is often used to halt righteous reform. People in general do not know the significance of historic religion for modern life, and this is due to the fact that the church has confined herself too exclusively to the study of tradition and has not performed a complete interpretation. Democracy has a moral right to expect that interpretation shall carry through to the active interest-centers of her own life. Anything less is pedantry and gets society nowhere.

The attempt to domineer knowledge so that scientific findings shall be in line with tradition is obsolescent. But there emerges from the futile and broken defenses of the church in this quarter a more glorious and positive task. It is not enough that opposition give way to concession. Concession must become indorsement and eager support. In order most largely to serve mankind the church must stand for unfettered research. Only by so doing may she hope to command for human service the findings of the most patient and accurate scholarship. Her religious education is not an attempt to keep knowledge in line with tradition, but rather to enforce her imperative of brotherly love in every application of the growing power of knowledge freely pursued. All processes of knowledge are unfettered, but every finding is, by her philosophy of life, dedicated to human service. Thus she makes education

religious by hallowing its objective. Inventions and discoveries are for the realization of her ideal of a perfect society. The unsocial conception of personal profit from superior or advanced knowledge is transmuted into a proportionate obligation to benefit mankind. To Christianize the use of knowledge and that other form of power, wealth, would mean almost a complete realization of the highest conceivable democracy. No agency in society today is held more clearly responsible for the effective presentation of this ideal than is the Christian church.

In religious education of the more technical sort a mutual obligation to get together rests upon church and state alike; the state being responsible, in its school system, for the granting of time and opportunity for religious training and the church being responsible for the organization and use of such time and opportunity. The deadlock occasioned by sectarianism and resulting in the exclusion of formal religion from public education must be broken by a more sensible view of teamwork and a right division of labor. Provisions whereby various religious bodies may undertake the religious nurture of their children in periods designated by the school authorities seem to be meeting with favor and success. The church is under obligation to use these growing opportunities efficiently and to warrant democracy's gradual recognition, in the public-school system, of the fact that the moral life grounded in religion is no mean asset to the state. The utter silence of the public school, implying the non-existence or negligibility of the religious interest, may yet be corrected in this way, with proper respect and great gain to all concerned. The raw materialism and bald self-interest, couched in the specious garb of "efficiency," may yet learn a great deal from this co-operation of the most distinctly altruistic and soul-respecting group in our midst. Until the state is prepared heartily to recognize this fact and to welcome such co-operation, she cannot justly criticize the church for failing to make her full contribution toward righteous citizenship.

Another function which democracy expects of the church is that of bridging the gulf between the law-abiding and the criminal classes. The church is the chief exponent of forgiveness and moral reform for the individual. Her religion is one of hope for those

who have fallen into vice and crime. The bonds of fatalism and the crushing judgment of society which enthrall and depress the offender have never paralyzed her practical faith in the moral resources of the individual and the power of recovery which may be found in divine help. The actual results of rescue work constitute evidence which no fair mind can wholly reject. Quite apart from difference of opinion as to any transcendental element involved, it is true that the message and ministry of religion have served to reconstruct many a broken life and, in an emotion running deeper than the grooves of evil habit, to weld the broken parts into new and masterful personality. No other set of people compete for this particular work.

However, something needs to be added to the more spectacular and occasional transformations thus wrought. The pitfalls and injustice resulting in crime must be removed, and the vengeance theory with which society blinds itself to these must give place to humane and reformatory effort. Here, as in the case of the public schools, the church has been too much left out of the reckoning. Possibly she has not pressed forward as an eager partner of the state in the understanding and treatment of the criminal. Her representatives have not been close enough to court and jail and prison to undertake a fair share of the difficult task of saving the culprit to his better self and to society. The complexity of the machinery, the vast proportions of crime in our great cities, and the fragmentary nature of Protestant effort have made the religious counselor too often an absentee in the case of men and families passing through the dreadful ordeal of broken law.

Not only so, but in all probationary methods whereby the offender, young or old, is being coached back into ways of integrity and social behavior, there is almost no co-operation between church and state. If pains were taken to connect the paroled prisoner or the reformatory graduate with the pastor of his persuasion in the locality to which he goes, much might be done to make this experiment in faith more largely successful. So also in the genesis of crime, and more particularly in the first outcroppings of juvenile delinquency, it would be a considerable asset if police and probation officers and judges would refer these cases at once to the local pastor

representing the religious affiliation of the person or family concerned. The church could add her support to the best efforts of the state. It is interesting and pertinent to know that almost no family considers itself isolated from every religious group. The strands of connection may be tenuous or chiefly imaginary, but the court records show an almost constant claim of relationship to some religious fold. If ever the church has opportunity to render superb service, it is at this very time, when the family is face to face with the probable humiliation and loss of one of its members; and because it can render distinctive help not offered by any other agency in this crisis, it should be an acknowledged and welcome partner of the state.

Such partnership reaches out into many fields, including among others the drunkard, the profligate, and the erring woman. The hope of the state to cure those crimes which are grounded in appetite, passion, and lust by legal barriers alone is heavily discounted by experience. While some improvement of conditions will result from strict laws vigilantly enforced, the recovery of an inner control which wills and does what is right depends most frequently upon the dynamic which religion supplies. Furthermore, the establishment of a public opinion favorable to social recovery rests upon the successful promulgation of the doctrine of brotherly love, which opens an upward way for the unfortunate and erring. Remove this religious temper from society, and the offender, whose experience at the hands of the law usually creates or confirms his antisocial grudge, will be but an animal in a cage; or, if he gets loose, his main joy will be in retaliation against a merciless social order. The church, rightly understood and actually functioning in this setting, is a door of hope which society greatly needs and should more generously use. The emotionalism of the appeal that has proved effective with the flagrantly unsocial should not blind very proper persons to the fact that revolution is not a drawing-room nicety. One should reflect also that the dearth of legitimate emotion is so constant in our mechanistic society, that nickel shows, ball games, and theatrical bombast are thronged by those who seek some sort of reaction to testify that they are alive. The church may legitimately use for moral ends and society's good some of the

water that is splashing over the artificial dam. She may save many citizens from the horrible sense of life's inutility, and give another chance to those who might only be a nuisance to themselves and a plague upon society.

The health interest of the people also offers opportunity for the church to assist in public service. The fact that church congregations are in aggregate and regularity of attendance and in average ability unsurpassed by any other meetings in the community indicates an opportunity to serve the state by the presentation of such subjects as public health, hygiene, sanitation, and health insurance. The proportion of the gospel devoted to this interest is remarkable, and the church is in true alignment with her mission when she acts as partner with the state in the spread of life-saving information. Hence, through pulpit, class instruction, and exhibit, the publicity side of health propaganda may be aided, while the financial support given to volunteer agencies that anticipate and lead public effort in combating sickness is no small part of the church's service. So also in the full or partial support of visiting nurses, church hospitals, orphanages, homes for the aged, etc., the church is rendering, in all, a very considerable aid to the state, and ideally, at least, infuses such service with a spirit of personal concern that tends to disappear from state agencies when they become perfunctory or fall a prey to spoils politics. Anyhow, in addition to the prosaic warmth of the iron radiator, these recipients of public care, being human, need the cheer of love's fire on the open hearth. Democracy expects such service to radiate from the church, and is disappointed only when religion is content with her philanthropic ministry to the ills flowing from social imperfection and injustice, and fails to attack the underlying economic causes.

Also in the matter of providing wholesome opportunity for sociability the church does much and is expected to do more. The popularity of the saloon and the public dance hall indicates, among other things, a shortage of suitable provision for social exchange. The physical equipment of the church to relieve this pressure and to direct it into happy experience often surpasses her willingness to undertake the task. Certain negative or anemic views of life,

together with some fear of becoming "worldly," impede a vigorous social policy. Hence youth's quest for social romance is needlessly exploited by greed and often debased in the process. Furthermore, a vast number of the more timid, including adults, will go along with almost no group experience outside the family, unless the church provides outlet, inducement, and direction. It is no small benefit to the common life to have this process of socialization and neighborliness fostered by the church. The forced isolation of city dwellers induces, not only social irresponsibility, which means poor citizenship, but precipitates many into wrongdoing which would have been impossible under the friendly surveillance of local acquaintance and neighborliness. Taken all in all, there is probably no social agency that is doing more than the church in contributing to this defensive friendliness, which in turn is a necessary ingredient in good citizenship. The democratic experience of the mass and other forms of public worship, augmented by a generous program of sociability, means a large contribution to public welfare.

In times past ecclesiastical architecture has adorned the state. The church holds a conviction that goodness and beauty are destined to coincide. Her doctrine of grace, conception of heaven, music, painting, and architecture testify to this conviction, and for the most part enrich the cultural wealth of the state. That the aesthetic may be overdone and hence call for crude reactions to discover human values has been pointed out in a former article.¹ However, when aesthetics does not divert righteousness to the land of the lotus it is innocent, and when it gives fairer fighting form to a just cause it is dynamic. Whatever adornment it has given the state in times when democracy's present problems were not conscious issues, it now happens that nothing but a full humanization of aesthetics will satisfy popular judgment. The house of the Lord should be decent; so should the homes of the poor. Beautiful lives and equality of opportunity to realize them takes precedence over beautiful buildings, boulevards, and whatnot, whenever the two conflict. An equitable distribution of wealth gives some promise of the beautiful life; an inequitable distribution has too often been

¹ *American Journal of Sociology*, XXI, No. 4 (January, 1916), 464.

the foundation of an aesthetics veering toward luxury and suggesting privilege. The church must discriminate. She is dedicated to beauty of life and in this is of one spirit with democracy. Beauty of things engages her attention only as means to this end; and, while poverty, disease, and other unsubdued vandals profane and wreck the human temple, lavishness is forbidden in her less holy enterprise. The sanctity of human values comes first and is the sole condition of sanctifying all other means.

This brings us around to the ever-recurring fact that nothing can take the place of righteousness. No service to the state can compare with the outspoken demand for justice. Let this fail, and the very palliatives of religion may help betray democracy. The "Get right with God!" gospel taken alone leads to self-deception or hypocrisy. How can anyone know conditions at the unseen end of that relationship? "Do right by man!" That is as old as Micah. "Treat him as thyself!" It is very ancient. On this empirical basis one both needs and dares to reach out after the Infinite. As the church demands justice at whatever cost to business and the established "system," she will contribute her largest, and no doubt her most sacrificial, gift to democracy.